Volume 7 Number 6

HARAMBEE FLAME

June 1986

A Publication of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization

MUSIC TO FREAK BY

In the "From Other Sources" section of this edition of the FLAME, there is a short article regarding the recent release of Fela Anikulapo Kuti from a prison in Nigeria. Those of us who are at all familiar with contemporary native African music know about Fela and his high-powered, finger-popping songs and their blend of hard-driving rhythms and politically, socially, and culturally relevant lyrics. In fact, it is the belief of many people, in Nigeria and in other parts of the world, that it was the biting commentary inherent in Fela's music that was responsible for Fela's arrest and subsequent conviction and imprisonment.

Toward the end of the decade of the 1960s, Les McCann and Eddie Harris collaborated on an album entitled "Swiss Movement," which included 'Compared To What,' a cut that attacked, among other things, American racism, U.S. aggression against Viet Nam, etc. This cut, much like the songs of Fela, addressed issues of profound importance to African people(primarily in America) and did so supported by music that was very stimulating, that set your feet into motion. Les and Eddie were not alone in this. Marvin Gaye, Cannonball Adderley, and other individuals and groups, during the late sixties and the beginning of the seventies, provided African people in this country with music by which we could be stimulated, both in a strictly rhythmic sense and spiritually as well. When Aretha came out with "Respect," regardless of whether she consciously intended the song as an anthem for an oppressed African people in the U.S., it became that. With Aretha, we demanded "respect." With Cannonball, we were ready to "walk tall," even though our liberation seemed at least "74 miles away."

Music makes you move. It makes your body move and can make your mind and spirit move. Art reflects life. Life reflects art. But the two are not limited to being reflections of each other. They can promote and influence each other. The period of the mid-sixties through the early seventies was a period of confrontation, reexamination, struggle, etc. A small but significant number of American-born African musicians, in the fields of rhythm-and-blues, blues, African-American classical music(jazz), and rock, served as veritable pied pipers for us, leading us and/or spurring us forward.

But the past twelve years or so have been years of an awesome retreat in which many of us have turned away from thinking of us and gotten hung up in thinking of me. "I'm gonna get mine," "Doing my own thing," "Getting over" are phrases descriptive of what many of us have been doing and have become. For the most part, "soul" and "funk" musicians - the most popular among African performers in the U.S. - appear to be utterly lacking in any sense of solidarity with their Sisters and Brothers, both in their music and in their public and private lives off the stage and outside the recording studios. Were one to try to gauge the conditions of African people in this country by the songs of most of our music "super-stars," he or she would get no inkling whatsoever that there are millions of us without employment, proper diet, adequate health care, etc. Such a person would get the impression that our major concerns were related to just about anything mindless. (Cont. on p. 6)

In This Issue:

MUSIC TO FREAK BY; READER COMMENTS ON OMAHA MAYOR; FROM OTHER SOURCES: Housing, U.N. Conference On Women, Boycott in Mississippi, Musician Released, African Economies; POEM by Wili.

OMAHA MAYOR REBUKED

-Sandra K. Booker

Nebraska State Senator Ernie Chambers again should be commended. He was the only one of North Omaha's so-called "black leaders" with ebough heart to expose Mayor Boyle as a racist. As I understand the chain of events, Mayor Boyle made the "professional nigger" comment to Omaha School Board member Brenda Warren Council in a personal conversation at a Democratic social function earlier this year. Ms. Council made no attempt to make the statement public, other than to mention it to a friend in an off-the-cuff and in-confidence remark. Thus, the rumor was started.

The rumor was established as fact recently when Senator Chambers, with his usual style of asking the unasked, wrote a letter to the Mayor, asking him to give explanation. Mayor Boyle, with his usual style of head-hanging, sheepishly stated that he supposed he owed the black community an apology. But, while he's supposing, he might suppose that his racist remark had been exposed only one week earlier. Had that been the case, one might be inclined to bet a dollar to a donut that the recall campaign being conducted at that time would have been successful.

As an elected official, Ms. Council has the press at her finger tips. She could and should have called a press conference in January, when Boyle made his "professional nigger" remark. Instead, she let the matter slide. Her non-action was almost as bad as the Mayor's insensitivity, as evidenced by the comment at issue. The mayor's comment that he thought he and Ms. Warren were "better friends than that" is an excellent example of the old adage: familiarity breeds contempt. No white person should ever be enabled to feet that he or she is so well loved by any black person that he or she can use the word "nigger" when talking to, for, or about a black person in any context.

Mr. Boyle, "nigger" is a fighting word. If you had said it to me, you may have found this out the hard way.

I never saw the President of the Committee to Recall Mayor Boyle, Wayne Lowden, quoted anywhere during the entire 30 days of the campaign. He is a man of few words. At the rally called to motivate supporters of the recall effort, he said something I feel bears repeating: "I think the Mayor should do the honorable thing and resign." I have to co-sign that suggestion. Moreover, I now understand why the Mayor is Omaha's only elected official with a body guard, hired through tax-payer funds.

.....

Editor's addendum: The Mayor, in giving his "apology" for his racist comment, stated that he had used "professional nigger" in reference to a man, a photographer, whom, in the Mayor's view, had attempted to use his color to secure business from the city. Boyle expressed the view that an understanding of this context would make it evident that his use of "nigger" wasn't really racist.

While few, if any, African folks in Omaha have expressed satisfaction with the Mayor's "apology," the Mayor is correct when he speaks of the importance of context. But this context is a larger and more significant one than that of which he speaks. This context is that which consists of the Mayor's identity as a person and as a politician and the nature of the relationship between African people throughout the U.S. and the political system. When we review Boyle's policies, actions, and statements, it should become clear to us that his use of the "fighting word" was no mere indiscretion or aberration but an expression in word of what the Mayor's actions had already proven to be his real attitude; namely, one of profound disrespect and contempt for African people. And this attitude is typical of Caucasian politicians, who court us for votes, when they need them, and then disregard us upon winning their respective posts. We know this, yet continue to put our arms around and shake hands with these professional good guys, posing with them for the newspapers and television, giving them our endorsements, etc., as if we didn't know any better.

While the Mayor's remark says something (which we should have already known) about him, the fact that many of us supported him may say more about us.

From Other Sources

Housing: Recalling the "War On Poverty"

"In the summer of 1967, riots exploded in over 100 American cities. Because 'most liberals equated slums with bad housing, as Allen Matusow puts it, 'Johnson responded to the ghetto crisis by sending Congress the most ambitious housing program in American history. Its purpose--to replace bad housing with good.'

"Since most housing in America--and virtually all nonrental housing--is provided by the private sector, the real estate industry had to be cut in...

"To build in a profit, the government had to eliminate the risk of foreclosure, which generally kept private investors out of the ghetto...Once the FHA(Federal Housing Authority) insured a mortgage, promising to pay it off if the buyer defaulted, the mortgage companies and banks had nothing to lose.

"The FHA would decide whether a loan was worth insuring by appraising the house, setting the price, and requiring proof from the mortgage company or bank that the buyers' income was sufficient, their credit was good, and the house was in good repair...Mortgage money would pour into the ghettos and America's poor would finally have a chance at the great American Dream, home ownership.

"It didn't work out that way. The pattern --documented by four congressional investigations, five Justice Department task forces, and five grand juries--went like this:

"A real-estate speculator discovers a racially changing neighborhood, or creates one by blockbusting--driving white owners out by bringing blacks in and spreading door-to-door panic about falling property values. He buys several houses at low cost from fleeing whites, makes superficial repairs, and persuades low-income people looking to rent to buy instead.

"The speculator lies to his inexperienced buyers, perhaps promising that repairs would be done as soon as they moved in. Then he falsifies documents about their income or credit, bribes the FHA appraiser to set an inflated price, and bribes the mortgage company inspector to overlook necessary repairs. Mortgage brokers and attorneys at closings are also cut in.

"The speculator walks away with a quick profit, and the mortgage company resells the loan to a bank or other secondary investor, making its profit by charging 'points'(fees based on a percentage of the loan). Meanwhile, the new owners find themselves with a home they cannot afford. Plumbing, heating, or wiring go bad; basements flood, roofs leak. The owners either abandon their house or run out of money for payments; in either case, the house is foreclosed, the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development(HUD) takes possession, and the FHA pays off the bank or secondary investor that owned the mortgage."

--Excerpted from "Winning Battles, Losing the War" by David Osborne, which appears on pages 13-21 of June edition of MOTHER JONES.

African Women From The U.S. Challenge Efforts to Undermine U.N. Conference & World Forum On Women

"Other key preparatory activities by Black women included challenging Reagan Administration choices for the official U.S. delegation to the conference, headed by the President's daughter, Maureen Reagan. Black women were under-represented on this delegation, and insult was added to injury when the top ranking Black woman in the U.S. State Deparment, Dr. Ann Stanford, was removed from the delegation because she out-qualified Maureen Reagan as delegation chair. In the end, four Black women were on the 35-member delegation, none from the grassroots or women's community and all singularly lacking in qualifications and experience on Black women's issues.

"Additionally, Black women secured and distributed copies of a secretly commissioned report by the Heritage Foundation, a right-wing think tank in Washington, D.C. This report(which no one would admit funding or reading) outlined U.S. policy towards the conference and recommended that the U.S.

(Continued on following page)

government destabilize the conference by: 1) pushing for 'adoption of a consensus rule' which would 'give the U.S. veto power over politically motivated resolutions'; 2) forcing the U.S. aid-dependent government of Kenya to establish 'tight controls on entry visas... to exclude the most radical of prospective delegates'(such as Black militants or lesbians); 3) using hotel space allocations to 'keep potentially troublesome delegations as small as possible'; and 4) 'threatening to withhold its (U.S.) 25 percent share of the conference budget.' In summary, the report said 'there should be no U.S. hesitation about using its financial leverage' to assure a U.S. dominated conference outcome. All of these strategies were soundly defeated by our record attendance and the strong organizing of Black women before and during the conference."

--Excerpted from "Black Women Challenge The Women's Movement" by Loretta J. Ross, which appears on pages 1, 13-15 of the winter-spring edition of AFRICAN WOMEN RISING.

Businesses Boycotted In Mississippi

A Black boycott of white-owned businesses and public schools here(Indianola, Miss.) has forced the school board to reverse itself and hire a Black superintendent.

"The 3-2 white majority on the local school board selected W.A. Grissom, a white, as school superintendent March 25, although the school district is 92% Black...

"The Black community announced a boycott of the public schools and white-owned businesses immediately after Grissom's appointment. The next day, only 10% of the city's 3000 public school students showed up for classes. The school board had an emergency meeting and closed the schools until the following Monday. On that Monday, Blacks returned to the schools and protest leaders met with the board in the hope that they would reverse their decision.

"But at an April 8 board meeting, the issue wasn't even raised. The Black community... announced a second boycott. Only 15% of students came to school for the remainder of the week, prompting the school board to announce that it was closing the schools again--this time indefinitely.

"Meanwhile, a boycott of white-owned businesses continued...

"Indianola businesses were hurting as a result of the boycott. Several were forced to close and most reported a loss of at least 30-40%. Local sales tax collections decreased by almost $30,000.

"The pressure of the boycotts finally forced Indianola's Board of Aldermen to demand Grissom's resignation April 14...

"Indianola's schools reopened for the second time on April 18. Blacks agreed to end the school boycott to insure that the city would receive state education funds and to allow seniors to graduate. The business boycott continued. But the school board still refused to budge...

"Grissom, fearing a shift in the board's position, consented April 30 to have his contract bought out. On May 1 the school board unanimously appointed Richard Merritt as the new superintendent."

--Excerpted from "Mississippi Boycotts Put Racists Down, But Not Out" by Danton Asher Berube, which appears on page 5 of the May 21 edition of the GUARDIAN.

Fela Released From Prison

"Nigerian singer Fela AnikulapoKuti was released from prison after serving 18 months of a five-year sentence for alledgedly trafficking foreign currencies. 'Fela,' as he is known throughout Africa, is famous for the rhythmic 'Afro-beat' jazz which he uses as a medium for biting social and political commentary. The Nigerian government under Gen. Muhammadu Buhari sentenced the musician to five years beginning November 1984. Many Nigerians found the charges to be rather dubious and felt the regime merely wanted to put an end to his criticism of corrupt government practices. Following a judicial inquiry and confrimation into allegations that he had been wrongly convicted, Fela

(Continued on following page)

was released, and the judge who convicted him was retired.

-Excerpted from "Star Set Free" on the back page of the May 19 edition of AFRICA NEWS.

AFRICAN ECONOMIES AND EXTERNAL PRESSURES

"In much of Africa, 'IMF'(International Monetary Fund) has become synonomous with 'hardship,' a perception which makes it politically difficult for African governments to cooperate with the Fund.

"The IMF is seen to operate on the assumption that countries in need of its assistance have mismanaged their economies. In return for new assistance, the Fund demands that nations restructure their economies along a free-market tract. The basic program usually calls for devaluation of local currency to curb imports and slow capital flight, cuts in government spending programs, the elimination or reduction in consumer subsidies, and restriction of the money supply. Inherent in these policies is the retrenchment of workers, wage freezes, higher prices and harder times--especially in the politically sensitive urban areas.

"Another change consistent with IMF recommendations is a reduction in the size of the government labor force. Africa has more state-owned enterprises than most other developing regions, and it has been estimated that public sector jobs account for half of all employment on the continent. But that is changing.

"The most potentially volatile measure advocated by the IMF is the devaluation of local currency, which sends prices soaring and people protesting. In the long-run devaluation is supposed to reduce balance of payments deficits in part by promoting exporting sectors and restricting those that depend on imports. This favors rural development and reduces smuggling and the opportunities available for the corruption that riddles the import business.

"The policies of the IMF and the lenders who support them are in essence demanding that Africa adopt a free-market economy and institute policies to remake themselves into economic images of the industrialized nations. Those who look warily upon the IMF think the objectives of its programs are aimed at 'making the developing countries perform better in their client relationship with the West.' They argue that the emphasis on export-led growth is designed to produce more efficient production of commodities in order for the debtors to earn more foreign currency to service debts to the West. Detractors also say the policies do not appear to be in line with the African objectives of self-reliant development..."

-Excerpted from "Debt: The Crisis Continues," which appears on pages 4-6, 15 of the May 19 edition of AFRICA NEWS.

BOOKs

ANGLO AMERICAN AND THE RISE OF MODERN SOUTH AFRICA by Duncan Innes

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA, edited by Chris Allen and Gavin Williams

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF RACE AND CLASS IN SOUTH AFRICA by Bernard Makhosezwe Magubane

Available from Monthly Review Press
155 W. 23rd. St.
N.Y., N.Y.
10011

DEVELOPING POSITIVE SELF-IMAGES & DISCIPLINE IN BLACK CHILDREN by Jawanza Kunjufu

COUNTERING THE CONSPIRACY TO DESTROY BLACK BOYS by Jawanza Kunjufu

Available from Bridges Book Center
1480 Main St.
Rahway, N.J.
07065

.....

If you've read a book lately that you think other African folks ought to read, you are encouraged to submit a review of it to the FLAME. Your review should not exceed 300-350 words.

MUSIC

In addition to the absence of allusion to the African reality in America, the songs by our "super-stars" are typically unartistic, unimaginative pieces of formula music designed to make the big bucks for the performers, record companies, etc. Moreover, many of these performers, on top of being mere programmed manufacturers of rhythmic mass-appeal commodities, apparently suffer from both ethnic as well as sexual identity crises. With the music video having become such an integral part of the promotional side of the music business, the issue of performer image stands out as having particular importance, as both the lyrics and the visual images of these videos project values.

What are these values? Essentially they are materialist, sexist, self-indulgent, and are often suggestive of - in the case of African people - rejection of the ethnic self. These music videos, as well as the music which they promote, are directed primarily toward teen audiences, toward young minds which are readily influenced. And chances are, owing to the sometimes staggering production costs of getting a video made and aired, our young folks are not going to hear much in the way of music that is either creative or socially constructive. Rather, they are going to hear (and see) that music which the record companies view as having hit-potential. And it is that genre which typically is comprised of the values mentioned above. It is that music, taken along with other influences, which contributes profoundly to a mind-set among too many African teens and young adults in this country whereby a concern about our collective condition is subordinated to an unquenchable desire to cop the latest fads in clothes, the latest hit, the latest variation on some toy theme.

In short, while there are some exceptions (Stevie Wonder, Gil Scott-Heron, and not too many others), most of our known musical performers in this country are not only failing in their artistic responsibilities(making music that engenders pride, that encourages social commitment, etc.) to us, but many of them are promoting values and projecting images that are actually destructive to us and opposed to our collective interests. Hopefully the music of Fela will gain in notoriety in the U.S. and inspire American-born African musicians to seek to achieve greatness in their music and a true sense of identification with and commitment to us.

-Editor, Wopashitwe Mondo Eyen we Langa(aka David Rice)

FLAME Editorial Policy

The HARAMBEE FLAME, the monthly publication of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization, is a Pan-Africanist newsletter. This means that the FLAME's priority, with respect to news and views, is African people and events and developments which affect us and are, or should be, of concern to us. The FLAME does not recognize any artificial distinctions among African people based upon place of birth. Therefore, references to African people are made on the basis of our common ancestry. An exception to this policy is the reprinting of articles, or excerpts thereof, from other publications, in which cases we do not alter the terms used therein to fit our editorial policy.

Articles contained in the FLAME do not necessarily reflect the views of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization unless they are accompanied by a statement identifying the views as being those of the organization. Generally speaking, all unsigned articles are by the editor.

We encourage you to submit articles to the FLAME. Please enclose with your submission a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Articles should not exceed 900 words. Short stories are subject to the same restriction with respect to length. We also welcome poetry and graphics. Send submissions to:

HARAMBEE FLAME
Attn: Mondo
Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization
P.O. Box 2500
Lincoln, NE
68502-0500

SUBSCRIBE TO THE FLAME

$6 per 12 issues

* LEMURES

-Wili Otey

seventeen years ago down in hialeah
this girl sam
chased me with a fishhook 'cause
i told her that i loved her(could not prove it)
me in my forty dollar shoes
sharkskin pants
italian knitted shirts(with)
no time for anything but
i ran back to new york city
where chicks broads and bitches knew i
was too cool
too cold
and me
i never forgot or forgave sam
and i went back to florida where she was in
the boots and saddle sipping wild irish rose
like it was champagne
believing this can be amerika when you have some cash
i ordered chevas regal
two hurricanes and quarters
'cause with my former boss's forged checks
i could prove anything then(including love)
so sam and me rode the miami side of town
first to the malls to dally about
moving like "yeah, man, we can buy it.
now! if we want to"
and the guy would get nice and we'd leave laughing
until sam introduced her illegitimate kids
and i had to have something in my veins
'cause the next thing i remembered was
sam and me
even caught diana ross doing billie holliday giving us the blues
when we could not buy any more time(to get high enough to die)
when we could not layaway any more luggage(as if we were going somewhere)
when we could not spend the future
trying to obliterate the past
sam showed me to a motel and
i took an extra long shower('cause the guy knew her first name)
and sam turned on the tv
ignoring me
but i knew words and myths are the same when
sam and we were ghosts two.

*the night-walking spirits of the dead(from Roman mythology)